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No. MPRS/12/1069/2021

07.12.2021

Shri Anurag Singh Thakur

Hon'ble Minister for Information and Broadcasting & Youth Affairs and Sports
Government of India

Respected Shri Anurag Singh Thakurji,

Sub:- Merging of Children's Films Society, India (CFSI), Films Division (FD), National Films Archive of India (NFAI) and Department of Film Festivals (DFF) with National Film Development Corporation (NFDC) – deviation from the recommendations of Bimal Julka Committee Report – allegations of possible real estate business and uncertainty about the future of non-profit activities of FD, NFAI and DFF – clarification – keeping further actions in abeyance – reg:

Kind attention is invited to the captioned subject.

I am writing this letter to draw your attention to the grievous allegations and reasonable apprehensions & suspicions being raised in the society regarding the proposed merger of CFSI, FD, NFAI and DFF with National Film Development Corporation (NFDC). According to the announcements made by the Ministry, the merger process will be accomplished in next two years.

However it is pertinent to note that how NFDC, a company registered under the Companies Act which has to generate profit for its operation and sustainability, can undertake projects and works of non-profit nature like preservation of Archives of invaluable films, etc. and non-profit activities being performed by FD & DFF, cast a shadow on the whole process. These non-profit oriented activities are highly inevitable for the Country for the preservation of its rich heritage as well as for promoting qualitative ventures rather than mere focusing on commercial productions or profits. It cannot be measured in terms of money. Let us take the example of Film Division. It was established in 1948 primarily to produce documentaries and news magazines for publicity of Government programmes and cinematic record of Indian History. In its archives, FD holds more than 8500 titles including priceless Indian News Review, documentaries, shorts and animations. The Major activities performed by Films Division are as follows:

- Production of Documentaries, short films, PSA films, animations, etc.
- Organization of Mumbai International Film Festival for Documentary, Short and Animation (MIFF) biennially since 1990.

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- Supply of Public Service Awareness (PSA) films to cinema theatres including distribution of prints/videos of its selected films to the Indian Missions abroad through the External Publicity Division of Ministry of External Affairs.
- In charge of the National Museum of Indian Cinema (NMIC), housed in its campus at Mumbai.
- Organization of film making workshops at North –Eastern States of India.
- Organization of film festivals and special screening of its films all over the country.

Likewise DFF and NFAI are also performing several crucial and non-profit oriented activities for the preservation and betterment of Indian Films and industry.

These aspects are to be examined carefully by taking into confidence of the stake holders including the employees before taking any further actions. But it is regretted to note that there are widespread complaints that the Government is opaque about its actions in this regard as evident from the denial of providing copy of the Report of Bimal Julka Committee even under Right to Information Act to public including Films Division staff association.

In order to streamline the activities of Films Division, the Ministry of I & B had earlier appointed the Shyam Benegal Committee in 1997 and the report was not implemented by the Government and in 2019, Ministry appointed an expert committee of filmmakers under the chairmanship of its former Secretary Shri Bimal Julka, with the terms of reference of the committee, as per PIB release of 2 June, 2020, as follows:

- To review the functioning of NFDC and CFSI
- To recommend whether to close NFDC and CFSI and explore any other alternatives, if required.

After the report was submitted and was accepted by the Government, the then Information and Broadcasting Minister conducted a press conference on 23 December, 2020 and announced the merger of the film units. But in contravention to the said statement by the Honourable Minister and to the "Terms of Reference" of the Bimal Julka Committee, an O.M. No. M 14011/3/2021-DO(FA), dated 09/09/2021 was learnt to be taken out by the Ministry, which talked the closure of FD, NFAI and DFF which is not actually within the ambit of the Bimal Julka committee on the basis of the Report of which the whole exercise is learnt to be being carried out. So the non-furnishing of a crucial committee report is being highly criticized by the stakeholders. The lack of clarity with respect to monetization of the assets/infrastructure of these entities further add fuel to the controversy. It is still shrouded in secrecy. It is learnt that these entities have owned properties and other assets in almost all prime cities, that too in prime locations, and that those properties have a value of several thousands of crores. The aggrieved stake holders are alleging that the real intention of the merger/closure is to slowly privatize the NFDC, once the merger is over, or to liquidate the same after a couple of years so that these assets can be sold or leased out for throwaway prices. It is to be read with the fact that NFDC itself is in loss.

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Films Division and NFAI are repositories of a huge national treasure in terms of recording the Audio Visual History of this Nation from pre- independent period till now and have content rich in varied national interests like Arts, culture, education, sports, Government development plans, biography of important leaders, etc and have recorded the development of the Nation on Film. The closure of these Government bodies or its activities means to erase, in a slow manner, the audio-visual record of this Nation.

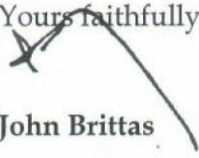
So it is imperative to publicize all connected reports and documents as well as to prepare and publish a plan of action and concrete roadmap regarding monetizing the assets/infrastructure of the units being merged, if the Government plans to do so, as well as the action plan for ensuring the non-retrenchment of employees including their proposed deployment avenues, well in advance to dispel the fears and apprehensions raised in this regard.

In these circumstances, I feel that the above matter demands your personal attention and intervention. I would be obliged if your goodself be pleased to examine the matter in detail and take suitable actions to dispel the allegations and grievances of the stake holders by making available all reports in the public domain as well as by preparing and publishing a plan of action and concrete roadmap as sought above. I further request you to keep all further actions in abeyance until the above steps are completed.

Your earliest action in this regard is highly solicited.

Thanking You.

Yours faithfully,


John Brittas